



## India

### International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, some state level laws and policies restricted this freedom.

The National Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, some state and local governments imposed limits on this freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the National Government during the period covered by this report; however, problems remained in some areas. Some state governments enacted and amended "anticonversion" laws and police and enforcement agencies often did not act swiftly to effectively counter communal attacks, including attacks against religious minorities.

During the reporting period, the Government of Rajasthan passed an "anticonversion law" that, similar to other laws of its kind, restricts and regulates religious proselytism. However, at the end of the reporting period, the Governor had not yet signed the new law.

During the reporting period, the State of Gujarat implemented its "Freedom of Religion" Law initially passed in 2003 and withdrew an amendment that would have defined "conversions" as occurring only between denominations and not between religions and would have classified Jains and Buddhists as denominations of Hinduism. This law requires prior permission from the Gujarat Government for a conversion ceremony.

The vast majority of persons of every religious group lived in peaceful coexistence; however, there were organized communal attacks against minority religious groups, particularly in states governed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In Orissa, governed by a coalition government that includes the BJP and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Hindu extremists attacked Christian villagers and churches in the Kandhamal district over the Christmas holidays. Approximately 100 churches and Christian institutions were damaged, 700 Christian homes were destroyed causing villagers to flee to nearby forests, and 22 Christian-owned businesses were affected.

Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that communal violence against religious minorities is part of a larger Hindu nationalist agenda and corresponds with ongoing state electoral politics. In May 2008 a terrorist attack killed almost 100 persons and injured more than 400 in Jaipur, Rajasthan. Six bombs exploded within 15 minutes in busy marketplaces close to crowded Hindu temples. This was a second attack in Rajasthan within a year and possibly a response to the October 2007 attack on Ajmer Shrief, an Islamic religious shrine, in which two persons were killed and several others injured. These recent attacks reflect a soft target focus, which terror groups hope will lead to violent communal flare-ups.

During the reporting period, communal violence continued between Hindus and Muslims over disputed places of worship. However, in contrast to previous reporting periods, there were no clashes at the Bhojshala complex in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh, where both Hindus and Muslims have disputed the right of the other group to offer prayers.

Hundreds of court cases remained unsettled in connection with the 2002 Gujarat violence.

The U.S. Embassy and its consulates promoted religious freedom in their discussions with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials, and supported initiatives to encourage religious and

communal harmony. During meetings with key leaders of all significant religious communities, senior U.S. officials discussed reports of harassment of minority groups, converts, and missionaries, as well as state-level legislation restricting conversion, the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat, and the plight of displaced Kashmiri Pandits.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1.3 million square miles and a population of 1.1 billion. According to the 2001 government census, Hindus constitute 80.5 percent of the population, Muslims 13.4 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, Sikhs 1.8 percent, and others, including Buddhists, Jains, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews, and Baha'is, 1.1 percent. Slightly more than 85 percent of Muslims are Sunni; the rest are Shi'a. Tribal groups (members of indigenous groups historically outside the caste system), which are generally included among Hindus in government statistics, often practiced traditional indigenous religions (animism).

Large Muslim populations are found in the states of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala, and Muslims are the majority in Jammu and Kashmir. Christians are concentrated in the northeast, as well as in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. Three small northeastern states (Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya) have large Christian majorities. Sikhs are a majority in the state of Punjab.

Approximately 200 million persons, or 17 percent of the population, belong to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST, formerly called "untouchables" and also known as "Dalits"). Some converted from Hinduism to other religious groups, ostensibly to escape widespread discrimination.

Under the National Commission for Minorities Act of 1992, five religious communities--Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, and Buddhists--are considered minority communities.

## Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the National Government generally respected this right in practice; however, some state and local governments limited this freedom by enacting or amending "anticonversion" legislation and by not efficiently or effectively prosecuting those who attacked religious minorities. Despite the National Government's rejection of "Hindutva," the ideology that espouses the inculcation of Hindu religious and cultural norms above other religious norms, "Hindutva" continued to influence some government policies and actions at the state and local levels. The National Government, led by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), continued to implement an inclusive and secular platform that included respect for the right to religious freedom.

Where "anticonversion" laws are not in place, local authorities on occasion have relied upon certain sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to arrest people engaged in religious activities. For example, IPC Section 153A prohibits "promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony." IPC Section 295A prohibits "deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings or any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs."

The country is a secular state with no official religion. The Constitution protects the right of individuals to choose or change their religion as well as practice the religion of one's choice. Many NGOs argue that state-level "anticonversion" laws are unconstitutional and may reinforce the dominance of the Hindu majority. Although these laws do not explicitly ban conversions, many NGOs argue that in practice "anticonversion" laws, both, by their design and implementation, infringe upon the individual's right to convert, favor Hinduism over minority religions, and represent a significant challenge to secularism.

While the law generally provides remedy for violations of religious freedom, it was not enforced rigorously or effectively in many cases pertaining to religiously oriented violence. Legal protections exist to cover

discrimination or persecution by private actors. The country's political system is federal and accords state governments exclusive jurisdiction over law enforcement and the maintenance of order, which limits the National Government's capacity to deal directly with state-level abuses, including abuses of religious freedom. The country's national law enforcement agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), cannot investigate a crime committed in a state without the state Government's permission. However, the National Government's law enforcement authorities, in some instances, have intervened to maintain order when state governments were reluctant or unwilling to do so.

Despite government efforts to foster communal harmony, some extremists continued to view ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities, particularly at the state and local level, as a signal that they could commit such violence with impunity, although numerous cases were in the courts at the end of the reporting period.

The opposition BJP, which has at times been aligned with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist organization, held power in seven states: Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, and Karnataka. The BJP also is part of ruling coalitions in five states: Punjab, Bihar, Orissa, Nagaland, and Meghalaya. Several NGOs alleged that during the reporting period, the BJP stoked communally sensitive matters as state elections grew near.

The Ministry for Minority Affairs, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) are governmental bodies created to investigate allegations of discrimination and make recommendations for redress to the relevant local or national government authorities. Although NHRC recommendations do not have the force of law, central and local authorities generally follow them. The NCM and NHRC intervened in several high-profile cases, including the 2002 anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat, the attacks against the Christian community in Orissa and other instances of communal tension, the enactment of anticonversion legislation in several states, and incidents of harassment and violence against minorities. The National Government earmarked \$329 million (Rs. 14 billion) for 2007-08 for the Ministry for Minority Affairs, an increase from the \$117 million (Rs. 5 billion) announced in 2006-07.

In 2008 the NCM published its study on the status of Dalits in the Muslim and Christian communities. The NCM argued that Dalit converts continue to face discrimination, even by their new coreligionists, and that religious affiliation makes no difference in terms of the socioeconomic status of Dalits. The Commission recommended that reservations be extended to Muslim and Christian Dalits.

In 2004 Parliament passed a bill creating the National Commission for Minority Education Institutions and in March 2006 it empowered the Commission to resolve disputes and investigate complaints regarding violations of minority rights, including the right to establish and administer educational institutions.

Federal and state laws that regulate religion include the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976, several state-level "anticonversion" laws, the Andhra Pradesh antipropagation law, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act of 1967, the Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988, the Foreigners Act of 1946, and the Indian Divorce Act of 1869.

The FCRA regulates foreign contributions to NGOs, including faith-based NGOs. Some organizations complained that the FCRA prevented them from properly financing humanitarian and educational activities.

There are active "anticonversion" laws in 5 of the 28 states: Gujarat, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh; however, there were no reports of convictions under these laws during the reporting period. Arunachal Pradesh has an inactive "anticonversion" law awaiting accompanying regulations needed for enforcement.

On April 1, 2008, the State of Gujarat published the rules and regulations necessary to activate its "Freedom of Religion Law," which was adopted by the legislature in 2003. The law proscribes converting anyone to a different religious group by means of allurement, force, or fraud. The regulations require the person conducting the conversion ceremony to apply for permission to conduct the conversion 1 month before the rite is to take place and gives the local magistrate the authority to grant or deny the right to convert. Within 10 days after the conversion ceremony, the person who converted must notify the magistrate of the name of the person who

conducted the rite and name those who were present. The law requires the magistrate who grants or denies permission for the conversion to provide a quarterly summary of conversion applications presented to him and an explanation for refusals. The law does not lay out the decision criteria to be used in reviewing these applications. The law carries a penalty of up to 3 years' imprisonment and a fine of up to \$1,250 (Rs. 50,000) per person converted. If the person converted is a minor, woman, or SC/ST member, the penalty is up to 4 years' imprisonment and a fine of up to \$2,380 (Rs. 100,000) per person converted. The July 2007 amendments proposed by the Gujarat legislature, which would have classified Jainism and Buddhism as denominations of Hinduism, Sunni and Shi'a as denominations of Islam, and Protestantism and Catholicism as denominations of Christianity, were withdrawn by the legislature on March 10, 2008.

On March 20, 2008, the Government of Rajasthan passed an "anticonversion" law in the state, which restricts and regulates religious proselytism. The law prohibits an individual from using "force, inducement, or fraudulent means" when contributing, in speech or conduct, to another individual's religious conversion. In 2006 the state assembly passed a similar bill, but it became null and void when the Governor twice refused to sign it and forwarded it to the President in 2007 for legal review and guidance on its constitutional merit. At the end of the reporting period, the State Governor had not signed the new bill.

The State Assembly passed the Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act 2006 in December 2006 and the Governor signed it into law on February 19, 2007. The law is unique because the secular Congress Party generated and passed it, while states ruled by the BJP enacted all of the other "anticonversion" laws. The law states, "No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any other fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion." The law stipulates punishment of up to 2 years' imprisonment and/or a fine of \$625 (Rs. 25,000). If SC/ST members or minors are involved, 5 years' imprisonment and/or a \$1,250 (Rs. 50,000) fine are the penalties. Any member of a religious group wishing to change his or her religious beliefs is required to give 30 days prior information to district authorities or otherwise face punishment of 1 month's imprisonment and/or a \$25 (Rs. 1,000) fine. However, returning to one's previous religious group is not considered violating this law.

Under provisions in the states of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, it is prohibited "to convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion." Such an offense is punishable with a maximum of 2 years' imprisonment and a maximum fine of \$220 (Rs. 8,800), with harsher penalties in the case of children, women, or SC/ST members. During the previous reporting period, in July 2006, the Governments of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh attempted to amend their existing laws to require prior notification to the Government of intention to convert, but these amendments became null and void in January 2007, when their respective governors refused to sign the bills.

The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act of 1967 states, "No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion." The law defines force as "a show of force or a threat of injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure or social excommunication," fraud as "misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance," and inducement as "the offer of any gift or gratification, either in cash or in kind and shall also include the grant of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise." Individuals breaking the law are subject to penalties such as imprisonment, a fine, or both. These penalties are harsher if the offense involves minors, women, or an SC/ST member. The law also requires that district magistrates maintain a list of religious organizations and individuals propagating religious beliefs, that individuals intending to convert provide a declaration before a magistrate, that priests declare the intent to officiate in a conversion ceremony, and that police officers determine if there are objections to a given conversion. There were no reports of district magistrates denying permission for religious conversions or of convictions under the Act during the period covered by this report.

The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) of 1967 empowers the Government to ban religious organizations that provoke intercommunity friction, have been involved in terrorism or sedition, or violated the 1976 FCRA.

There were no requirements for religious groups to be licensed; however, the Government prohibits foreign missionaries of any religious group from entering the country without prior clearance and usually expels those

who perform missionary work without the correct visa. Long-established foreign missionaries generally can renew their visas, but the Government has not admitted new resident foreign missionaries since the mid-1960s. There is no national law barring a citizen or foreigner from professing or propagating religious beliefs; however, the Foreigners Act prohibits speaking publicly against the religious beliefs of others, since it is deemed dangerous to public order. The Act prohibits visitors on tourist visas from preaching without prior permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

In 2007 Andhra Pradesh enacted the "Propagation of other religions in the places of worship or prayer (Prohibition) Law." Thus far, the state has identified only Hindu religious sites for this protection. Punishment for violations of the act can include imprisonment up to 3 years and fines up to \$125 (Rs. 5,312). To date, there have been no prosecutions under the Act. A fact-finding team from the NCM found that the prohibition is not in line with the Constitution's protections of freedom of religion, adding that the IPC has provisions sufficient to deal with offenses committed in places of worship.

Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, UP, and West Bengal have laws regulating the construction of public religious buildings and the use of public places for religious purposes.

In 2006 the Kerala High Court determined that Allah is synonymous with God and ruled that taking an official oath in the name of Allah is constitutionally valid.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 lists offenses, including those pertaining to religious duties and practices, against disadvantaged persons and provides for stiff penalties for offenders.

Article 17 of the Constitution outlawed untouchability; however, members of lower castes remained in a disadvantageous position. The Government continued to implement a quota system which reserved government jobs and places in higher education institutions for SC/ST members belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist religious groups, but not for Christians or Muslims.

Christian groups filed a court case demanding that SC converts to Christianity and Islam enjoy the same access to "reservations" as other SC and argued that Christian SC suffer from the same caste-based socioeconomic and political stigmas and discrimination. The usual counterargument is that there is no caste system in Christianity and, therefore, no need to extend reservations to SC Christians. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court, which had not ruled by the end of the reporting period. Reservations existed in Andhra Pradesh for Muslims. Reservations also existed for certain Muslim other backward caste (OBC) grouping communities in Maharashtra. In May 2007 the Mishra Commission recommended 15 percent of jobs in government services and places in education institutions be reserved for minorities. The Commission also recommended including Muslim and Christian Dalits on the SC/ST list.

Under Article 25 of the Constitution, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism are considered sects of Hinduism; however, these groups continue to view themselves as unique religious groups and sought to introduce their own separate personal laws. Sikhs have sought a separately codified body of law to legally recognize their uniqueness and preclude ambiguity. The 1992 National Commission for Minorities (NCM) Act identified Buddhism as a separate religion. The Supreme Court rejected the inclusion of Jainism under the NCM Act, stating that the practice of adding new religious groups as minorities should be discouraged. According to press reports, state governments have been given power to grant minority status to religious groups designated as minorities under the 1992 Act, but not all states have officially done so. On June 10, 2008, the Delhi Government decided to accord minority status to the Jain community. Jains have already been accorded this status in the states of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and UP. State Minorities Welfare Departments confirmed that the states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka recognize Sikhs as minorities.

There are different personal status laws for the various religious communities, and the legal system accommodates religion-specific laws in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance. The Government grants a significant amount of autonomy to personal status law boards in crafting these laws. There is a Hindu law, Christian law, Parsi law, and Islamic law--all legally recognized and judicially enforceable. None of these are exempt from national and state-level legislative powers and social reform

obligations as laid down in the Constitution.

The Indian Divorce Act of 2001 limits inheritance, alimony payments, and property ownership of persons from interfaith marriages and prohibits their use of churches to celebrate marriage ceremonies in which one party is a non-Christian. Clergymen who contravene its provisions could face up to 10 years' imprisonment. However, the Act does not bar interfaith marriages in other places of worship.

In November 2007, under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act 2006, the Government provided clearance for members of all religious groups to legally adopt.

The Government permits private religious schools, but does not permit religious instruction in government schools. The Government may prescribe merit-based admission for religious colleges that receive public funding, while those that do not may use their own criteria, including religious affiliation.

Many Hindu sects have established schools, although they do not receive aid from the state.

There are approximately 30,000 madrassahs (Islamic schools). Most of them did not accept government aid, alleging that it would subject them to stringent security clearance requirements. Educational institutions given "minority status" by the Government are not eligible for government aid.

The Government's National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) published textbooks that are uniformly used in government and private schools and printed in various languages. In 2007 the Government released new NCERT textbooks, which it asserted more accurately portrayed minority religious groups, among other changes, and restored the secular character of education.

The major holy days of the country's predominant religious groups are considered national holidays, including Good Friday and Christmas (Christian); the two Eids (Islamic); Lord Buddha's Birthday (Buddhist); Guru Nanak's Birthday (Sikh); Dussehra, Diwali, and Holi (Hindu); and the Birthday of Lord Mahavir (Jain).

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

According to media reports, the Government renewed the ban on the Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) on February 7, 2008, for the fourth time, based on concerns about terrorism. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Tribunal in February 2008 extended the ban on an Islamic sect, Deenadar Anjuman, for a further period of 2 years from August 2007.

In July 2007 a Christian organization claimed in a petition before the Gujarat High Court that in April 2007 an Ahmedabad police precinct gathered information about local faith-based charities, such as the Salvation Army. The Ahmedabad police commissioner denied the allegation. At the end of the reporting period, the Court had not determined what actually transpired.

Press reports documented the activities of foreign missionaries who proselytized while carrying a tourist visa. Foreigners with tourist visas who engage in missionary activity are subject to deportation and possible criminal prosecution. Foreigners are responsible for requesting the correct type of visa; generally, there are no provisions for changing immigration categories once admitted.

On November 21, 2007, following violent protests in Muslim-dominated areas in central Kolkata against author Taslima Nasreen, the West Bengal administration arranged for her departure from the state. The administration sent the Bangladesh-born writer first to Rajasthan and later to an undisclosed location near Delhi. During her stay in Delhi, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee assured Nasreen shelter and protection in the country but urged her to "refrain from activities and expressions" that could hurt the sentiments of Muslims and harm relations with friendly countries. Nasreen apparently agreed to a compromise with the Government and on November 30, 2007, removed three pages from her book *Dwikhondito (Split up into Two)*. The book was criticized by Muslims as "anti-Islamic." On August 9, 2007, three legislators of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen in Hyderabad attacked the author on the same basis when she was there for the release of the Telugu version of her book *Sokhe*. The legislators were detained after the incident but

not prosecuted. Nasreen fled the country in March 2008.

The Government maintained a list of banned books that may not be imported or sold in the country because they contain material that governmental censors deem inflammatory and could provoke communal or religious tensions. The Rajasthan Government continued to ban the books *Haqeeqat (The Truth)* and *Ve Sharm Se Hindu Kahate Hain Kyon? (Why Do They Say With Shame They Are Hindus?)* for alleged blasphemy against Hindu gods.

Buddhist monks continued to question the management of the 1,500-year-old Mahabodhi temple in Bihar's Bodh Gaya by non-Buddhists. The monks accused non-Buddhists of chopping off a branch of the holy Mahabodhi tree. They requested that the Government hand over management of the temple to them by amending the Mahabodhi Temple Management Act.

Missionaries and foreign religious organizations must comply with the FCRA, which limits overseas assistance to certain NGOs, including ones with religious affiliations.

### Abuses of Religious Freedom

While there were no reports accusing the National Government of committing abuses of religious freedom, human rights activists criticized it for alleged indifference and inaction in the face of abuses committed by state and local authorities and private citizens.

The opposition party BJP, the RSS, and other affiliated organizations (collectively known as the Sangh Parivar) claimed to respect and tolerate other religious groups. However, the RSS opposed conversions from Hinduism and expressed the view that all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, should adhere to Hindu cultural values. During the reporting period, the BJP continued to advocate contentious measures such as the passage of "anticonversion" legislation in all states, the construction of a Hindu temple on the Ayodhya site, and the enactment of a uniform civil code.

On June 18, 2008, Shiv Sena official Bal Thackeray publicly advocated the creation of "Hindu suicide squads" to fight "Islamic terrorism." The remarks immediately drew sharp condemnation from Shiv Sena political ally BJP, which said Thackeray must behave responsibly. Media reported that the Congress Party and the Communist Party of India (CPI) also reacted angrily saying Thackeray should not attempt to instigate communal strife. The BJP was associated with some instances of dissemination of information promoting religious intolerance. In April 2007 the BJP released a compact disk (CD) as part of its UP election campaign material, which was widely criticized for its offensive depictions of the Muslim community. The BJP claimed to have withdrawn the CD; however, its contents were published and broadcast by the media. The Election Commission filed cases against those involved in the matter under the Representation of People's Act. The BJP filed a response and stated that the CD was not part of their official campaign materials and that it had fired the party's spokesperson in UP for releasing the CD. No further action was taken.

Faith-based media and other sources reported attacks against Christians in various states that are summarized below.

Christian and human rights groups in Karnataka reported continued attacks on believers and missionaries. Activists alleged that expectations of a possible BJP victory in the May 2008 state elections dampened police enthusiasm to investigate.

There were reports of arrests under state-level "anticonversion" laws and other restrictive laws during the reporting period. There were 14 reported arrests in 4 separate incidents under the Madhya Pradesh "anticonversion" law, compared with 11 arrested during the previous reporting period. However, there were no convictions, and all of those arrested were released on bail with their cases pending. The specific incidents are detailed elsewhere in this report.

Faith-based NGOs and the media indicated that authorities arrested 26 persons in Chhattisgarh, 7 in Madhya Pradesh, and 13 in Maharashtra during the reporting period for violence against Christians. Many of these

cases involved communal attacks on Christians or their property, and in some cases, police brutality was reported. In one instance, those attacked were reportedly arrested.

According to local press, on June 30, 2008, Catholic churches across Kerala held protests demanding the immediate withdrawal of a controversial elementary school social studies textbook. The Catholic Church argued that the book teaches children atheism and communism. Protest marches were held in several cities and towns including Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, and Kollam with the support of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council (KCBC). The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M)-led Left Democratic Front government issued the textbook. Other religious groups, including Muslim organizations and the Hindu Nair Service Society, also demanded the immediate withdrawal of the text.

On June 22, 2008, "*Hindutva*" extremists belonging to the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)*, *Bajrang Dal*, and BJP attacked a Christian prayer meeting, beating participants and the pastor, Jonathan Singh, in Krishnagar, Dehradun (Uttaranchal). A delegation of Christian leaders went to the Garhi Cantonment police station, where the officer-in-charge declined to register a First Information Report (FIR) and advised them instead to contact local BJP legislator Harbans Kapoor. Dehra Dun Senior Superintendent of Police Amit Sinha said he would look into the matter.

On Easter Sunday, March 23, 2008, in the Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh, seven persons associated with the RSS attacked the evening service of a house church. They beat the pastor, who was the owner of the house, and his wife, looted the house, seized religious literature, and destroyed the roof. When the attack was reported to the police, instead of pressing charges against the RSS members, the pastor was arrested and later released on bail. One attacker who was injured while trying to destroy the roof allegedly filed a false claim of assault against the pastor.

On March 11, 2008, alleged members of the RSS punched, kicked, and slapped a pastor in Maksi district, Madhya Pradesh, when he was on his way to a congregant's house, carrying Christian literature. The assailants *dragged the pastor to the police station, where he was charged with disturbing the peace as well as harming and insulting religious sentiments of the community. The pastor reported being subjected to further physical abuse while in police custody. He was released on bail 3 days after his arrest.*

There were numerous reports of acts of violence against Christians in Madhya Pradesh. On February 22, 2008, members of the Bajrang Dal attacked five Christians meeting in a home in the town of Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh. On February 27, the newly elected president of the Balaghat Christian Association, Robin Singh, a medical doctor, was beaten for providing legal help to the previous victims. Singh filed charges against his attackers, but no arrests were made in either case.

On February 2, 2008, a group of 20 men allegedly belonging to the Bajrang Dal barged into the house of a pastor who was conducting church services in his house near Bangalore, Karnataka, abused those present, and then burned Bibles found in the hands of worshippers. The pastor filed a case with the local police station and claimed that action was not taken against the attackers.

On January 17, 2008, **in the** Rewa district of Madhya Pradesh, extremists stormed a house church, abducted two Christians, and severely beat them. The two Christians alleged that they were taken to the jungle to be sacrificed but that the attack was interrupted by a cell phone call to the attackers warning them that the police were aware of the kidnappings.

On January 9, 2008, in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh, a pastor and five of his congregants were invited to pray for the healing of a Hindu villager who regularly attended their services for a month. The house where they were praying was attacked by alleged members of Dharma Sena. There were no reports of police action against the attackers, but the six Christians were arrested on charges of "forcible conversion" and "hurting religious sentiments."

In September 2007 the CBI closed the case against Jagdish Tytler due to a lack of witnesses. However, on December 18, 2007, Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate of Delhi court Sanjeev Jain ordered the CBI to reopen cases relating to 1984 anti-Sikh riots against Jagdish Tytler.



On November 19, 2007, in the Bastar district of Chhattisgarh, a mob, allegedly led by the Bajrang Dal, demolished a house church and beat the pastor and his followers. The following day, a young relative of the pastor who allegedly was kidnapped by the extremists was found dead in a nearby jungle, his head crushed by a stone. The superintendent of police of Bastar reportedly confirmed the incidents but denied that Hindu extremists were behind the attack and killing and declared that the incident involving the relative was a separate matter. Allegedly, when the pastor complained to the police about the attack, he and some of his congregants were detained for 24 hours without food or water. The police arrested 21 local residents following the demolition of the church, none of them Hindu extremists, on claims that the residents were angry that the pastor had insulted other gods.

On November 4, 2007, in Thane District, Maharashtra, extremists armed with wooden clubs barged into the worship service of the Mumbai Diocesan Missionary Movement and beat several members brutally enough that they required hospital treatment. When the pastor went to the police to complain about the attack, he was detained and then later released with no charges filed against him. No police action was taken against those who committed the attacks.

On October 23, 2007, Hindu extremists beat a pastor in Thane District, Maharashtra. The report alleged that after the victim filed a complaint, police charged 11 of the people attending the pastor's prayer meeting for "disrupting peace in the area." Worship services were cancelled for 2 weeks because of the attack.

On October 10, 2007, in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, a mob reportedly associated with the RSS attacked two Christian schools, Holy Cross School and St. Xavier's School, for declining to observe a holiday on a Hindu festival. The principal's office was ransacked at St. Xavier's. No police action was taken.

On September 29, 2007, in Dhar district, Madhya Pradesh, Hindu villagers beat a pastor and filed a complaint against him, his wife, and four other Christians, accusing them of conversion by "allurement." The pastor had been conducting a healing service for a villager. Police arrested them under the state "anticonversion" law and several other sections of the IPC. They were released on bail 2 days later. The attackers were not arrested.

In Maharashtra there was one reported anti-Christian incident precipitated by a BJP-related group during the reporting period: On August 26, 2007, in the Andheri Section of Mumbai, members of the *Bajrang Dal* filed a complaint of "forcible conversion" and "deliberately injuring religious sentiments" against a Christian pastor. The complaint was filed by Hindu individuals who had attended a baptism ceremony. No further details were provided.

On July 15, 2007, in the Detalath area of Madhya Pradesh, villagers, allegedly instigated by the *Bajrang Dal*, disrupted the screening of a film based on the life of Jesus Christ and threatened the organizers. The following day, the villagers threatened a Christian as he returned from his pastor's house and threatened to burn down his house if he attended any Christian meetings. The pastor filed a police complaint against the assailants, but police did not register it.

On July 14, 2007, in the Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh, members of *Dharma Sena*, accompanied by two policemen, attacked Christian evangelists waiting at a bus stop. The attackers emptied their satchels, dumping out Christian literature, and slapped the Christians. Police questioned the Christians and issued them a warning not to visit Dohania again.

On July 6, 2007, in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, alleged members of the Dharma Sena humiliated and injured a Christian pastor, putting a garland of shoes and slippers around his neck. They took the pastor to the Telibandha police station. Reportedly, officers ensured that he received first aid but later arrested him for "hurting religious feelings." A magistrate remanded him to judicial custody, and he was released on bail approximately a month later. The chief of the Dharma Sena and four others were arrested for the attack, but all were quickly released on bail.

On July 1, 2007, in the Durg District of Chhattisgarh, approximately 50 alleged members of Dharma Rakshak Sena and the Bajrang Dal disrupted the Sunday worship service at a church, beat the pastor and church members, and stole music. Reportedly, the police refused to register a complaint.

According to the All India Christian Council (AICC), Pastor Kinnera Kanankaiah and his wife were attacked by Hindu activists on June 22, 2007, in Siddipet, Medak District in Andhra Pradesh for alleged conversion activities. The victims filed a report with local police.

On June 7, 2007, right wing activists attacked Philadelphia Holy Church and removed a new fence around the church property, alleging illegal land use. The church had previously won a court challenge to their ownership of the land. Police responded to the attack but refused to let the church use the land.

On June 2, 2007, two Christians were arrested for distributing Christian literature in Amaravati, a Buddhist temple town in Guntur district in Andhra Pradesh. They were later released on bail.

In April 2007 authorities in Andhra Pradesh arrested three pastors and filed cases under IPC 295A and 298 for hurting religious sentiments. Local residents alleged that the pastors led 26 foreign tourists, including several U.S. citizens, into the Chikadpally slum in Hyderabad where they engaged in conversions and made derogatory remarks against Hindu gods.

In March 2007 Bangalore police arrested two Christian missionaries, including one foreign citizen, for allegedly making statements ridiculing Hindu deities. Both missionaries were released on bail the next day.

The Government, in response to a Delhi High Court ruling in connection with the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, paid \$3,075 (Rs. 123,000) to several persons injured during the riots. In March 2007 a Delhi High Court convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment three persons--Harprasad Bhardwaj, RP Tiwari, and Jagdish Giri--for lynching a Sikh policeman, his son, and another relative during the anti-Sikh riots. The court also fined each convict \$125 (Rs. 5,000). Two other accused individuals were acquitted due to insufficient evidence.

In February 2007 a local BJP leader and his followers allegedly attacked three pastors of the Believers' Church while they were holding a prayer meeting in Chhattisgarh. The party leader also tried to register a complaint against the pastors for engaging in conversion activities; however, the police did not register the case because it could not substantiate the allegation.

According to religious media outlets, in December 2006 a subinspector of police in Andhra Pradesh assaulted a group of Christians displaying a religious film, despite the fact that the village head had granted permission to the Christian community.

In November 2006 police refused to file a FIR against a local BJP politician and party workers who had allegedly attacked six Christians at a village meeting in Bastar, Chhattisgarh.

In October 2006 the Chhattisgarh BJP Government reportedly closed a government-financed, Christian-operated child nutrition center in Chhattisgarh and fired 17 employees on suspicion of engaging in conversion activities.

In August 2006 police officers allegedly pressured a Christian convert to reconvert to Hinduism in Karnataka.

In August 2006 in Gujarat, police shooting killed three persons (two Muslims and one Hindu) during protests by Muslims of the local administration's action to breach the wall of an Islamic cemetery to let flooding waters subside.

According to reports, in July 2006 the police in UP physically assaulted a Christian convert, allegedly at the behest of VHP members.

In July 2006 in Bhiwandi, while dispersing a rioting mob of Muslim protestors, Maharashtra police killed two Muslims. Two Hindu policemen were subsequently lynched by rioters in a dispute between a Muslim organization and the police over the construction of a police station adjacent to an Islamic cemetery. The mob burned several buses of a local public transport company, and 18 persons were injured, including 12 policemen.

There were no developments in the case of the May 2006 demolition of a Vadodara city Islamic shrine by the city government. The riots after the demolition led to the death of two Muslims as a result of police firing and three Hindus by stabbing.

There were no developments in the case of the July 2006 killing of two Muslims in police firing to disperse rioters in Bhiwandi, Maharashtra. The rioters were protesting the proposed location of a police station next to a Muslim cemetery. These riots also led to the death of two Hindus by lynching.

Press reported that in January 2006 ten persons were injured after the demolition of the Christ Mission Ashram church in Kolkata, West Bengal, in a clash between church members and Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority workers. The government later allotted other land to the mission to relocate the church and its facilities. The mission continued to operate on the new land.

In 2006 police launched a judicial inquiry into clashes between Hindu and Muslim residents in UP. An NCM investigation determined that the UP administration initially did not take appropriate steps to prevent the violence. No known action was taken as a result of this investigation.

Between May and October 2005, communal riots in UP resulted in the deaths of 7 persons and injuries to 36, including 8 police officers. In October 2005 the UP Government convened a three-member committee to determine the cause of the riots and filed charges against BJP politicians Mukhtar Ansari and Ramji Singh for inciting communal discord. The committee also reported that BJP Member of Parliament Yogi Adityanath had a role in instigating the communal clashes but did not file charges against him.

Allegations of forced conversion and "defamation of Hinduism" led to harassment of Emmanuel Ministries International (EMI), a large charitable organization in Rajasthan, by members of the Sangh Parivar. In February 2006 the Rajasthan Government revoked the licenses of EMI-owned charities including a Bible institute, orphanage, school, hospital, and church. In March 2006 the Department of Social Welfare of Rajasthan froze the organization's bank accounts. In June 2006 the Jaipur High Court instructed the State Government to show cause regarding the closing of the EMI property and instructed the accounts to be unfrozen.

Authorities held EMI President Samuel Thomas in judicial custody from March 17 to May 2, 2006, for hurting the religious sentiments of Hindus. Thomas was later charged with sedition in May 2006 for the use of a map on an EMI-affiliated website that did not include Jammu and Kashmir as part of the country. The Supreme Court granted Thomas bail but restricted his travel. By the end of the reporting period the charges had not been dropped.

There were no further developments in the June 2006 case of harassment of four tribal Christians by rural police in Maharashtra.

In May 2006 in Punjab, after protests by Delhi AICC leaders, police arrested three Hindu extremists for a raid on an Easter Day event, in which they threatened worshippers and vandalized property. When the pastor attempted to register a FIR, the Senior Superintendent of Police told him that permission from the district magistrate was required but later permitted the services.

There was continued concern about the failure of the Gujarat Government to arrest those responsible for the communal violence in 2002. Home Ministry figures indicated that 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed and 2,500 others injured. Some NGOs maintained the number of Muslims killed was higher, with estimates from 1,000 to 2,500. There were also reports of rape, gang rape, and molestation of Muslim women. According to a 2005 survey by the NHRC monitoring committee, approximately 4,300 Muslim families (between 25,000 and 30,000 individuals) were still internally displaced and living in makeshift camps with inadequate infrastructure. Persons told the committee that they feared retaliation by their Hindu neighbors if they returned to their villages. They also feared that Hindu neighbors would pressure them to withdraw their complaints filed in connection with the 2002 violence. In August 2007 Gujarat Chief Secretary Sudhir Mankad reportedly conceded in a meeting with the NCM that 3,600 families in 46 makeshift camps had not been able to return to their original residences. Mankad also acknowledged that many of the poorest families in the camps had not received "Antyodaya" cards, which allow them to receive subsidized food grains.

In March 2006 the government-established commission headed by Justice Banerjee issued a report stating that the 2002 train fire in Gujarat that led to communal violence was an accident and ruled out an Islamic conspiracy. The commission also accused the then-Railway Minister and the Railway Safety Commission of failing to adequately investigate the accident. The Gujarat High Court initially prevented the release of the report to Parliament, but Indian Railways petitioned the Supreme Court for its release; an appeal that was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

The Nanavati-Shah Commission, established in 2002, continued its hearings into the Gujarat 2002 violence. It has received 6-month extensions on a regular basis. In March 2008 Justice Shah died. The Government of Gujarat appointed Justice Apurva Mehta to replace him. By the end of the reporting period, there was no indication when the reconstituted Nanavati-Mehta commission would submit its report.

In November 2007 the newsweekly *Tehelka* published secret recorded interviews with many of the accused in the 2002 anti-Muslim violence in which some freely admitted their role in the violence, as well as police and BJP-leadership complicity. Arvind Pandya, the lawyer representing the Government of Gujarat, allegedly claimed to the reporter that Justice Shah was sympathetic to BJP ideology and that Justice Nanavati was interested in prolonging the deliberations. Pandya resigned after the story was published. In March 2008 the NHRC ordered a CBI enquiry based on the *Tehelka* tapes. The Government of Gujarat contended that a separate CBI inquiry was unwarranted because the *Tehelka* tapes were already being considered by the Nanavati-Mehta commission. The NHRC overruled the state.

Many human rights groups continue to believe that those responsible for the 2002 Gujarat violence would largely go unpunished despite sporadic judgments convicting Hindu assailants and the few high-profile cases the Supreme Court was directly supervising.

The *Tehelka* revelations substantiated this view. Dilip Trivedi, a senior advocate of the VHP, allegedly gave the reporter the statistics for disposal of cases in Mehsana, one of the districts which were an epicenter of violence. According to Trivedi, police registered 182 complaints, of which only 80 reached trial. Of the 76 trials completed by November 2007, in 74 cases all the accused (Hindu perpetrators of anti-Muslim violence) were acquitted. In the remaining two cases, where some punishments were given by the special courts, the VHP appealed the cases in higher courts, and the accused were out on bail.

During the previous reporting period, Gujarat police registered several new complaints relating to the 2002 violence and arrested some high-profile accused. However, in many of the cases tried in the Gujarat lower courts, the accused were acquitted due to lack of evidence or changes in testimony. Two women's rights activists reported that the National Government had reported to a U.N. agency in October 2006 that up to that time, only 6 cases relating to 2002 violence resulted in convictions, whereas 182 cases resulted in acquittals.

In its February 2006 response to the Supreme Court, the Gujarat police said that it would reexamine 1,600 of the 2,108 cases that were closed after the riots. However, during the previous reporting period, the Gujarat police closed as many as 1,600 cases, citing the unavailability of witnesses.

In March 2008 the Supreme Court issued notices to Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, Director General of Police P.C. Pandey, and 66 others to inquire why a FIR had not be filed based upon the complaint of Zakia Jafri, one of the survivors of the 2002 violence. Jafri had been trying since June 2006 to register a complaint against Gujarat government officials for their complicity in the violence. She applied to the Supreme Court for redress after the Gujarat police failed to register her complaint, and a Gujarat sessions court and the Gujarat High Court turned down her pleas.

In March 2008 the Supreme Court announced that a Special Investigation Team (SIT) of senior police officials would study ten high-profile cases (including the Godhra train arson case) and advise the Court on whether these cases need to be reinvestigated or transferred out of Gujarat. Since November 2005 the Supreme Court has stayed the proceedings in these cases while it considers petitions filed by human rights groups, the NHRC, and by some victims, alleging that justice could not be obtained in Gujarat courts. On April 25, 2008, the SIT visited the town of Godhra and the railway station and inspected the burnt train car. By the end of the reporting period, the SIT had not submitted its report. In April the SIT arrested Parbat Thakore, who was accused of being involved in the Gulbarg massacre where Ehsan Jaffri was killed.

In March 2002, during the post-Godhra anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat, a Muslim woman, Bilkis Bano, was gang-raped and several members of her family were killed by Hindus. The Supreme Court ordered the CBI to reinvestigate the case and try it in a Mumbai special court. In January 2008 a Mumbai special court sentenced 11 Hindu rioters and 1 policeman. The court acquitted seven defendants, including five policemen and two doctors. By the end of the reporting period, the Government of Gujarat had not appealed the judgment in the Mumbai High Court. During the previous reporting period, a Mumbai Court convicted 9 persons of the murder of 14 Muslims in the Best Bakery case and sentenced them to life in prison.

In October 2007 eight persons were sentenced to life in prison while three others were sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment by a Godhra court in the 2002 Eral massacre case that left seven persons dead in the aftermath of the Godhra riots. Twenty-nine persons were acquitted in the case.

In June 2005 the Central Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) Review Committee recommended that POTA charges be dropped against many Muslims in connection with the Gujarat violence due to insufficient evidence; however, at the end of the reporting period, they were still being held without charge. According to the Islamic Relief Committee of Gujarat, 130 Muslim youth remained in custody in Gujarat under POTA awaiting trial at the end of the report period. Since 2003 the Supreme Court has stayed trials in nine high-profile cases, including the Godhra train arson case. The Supreme Court had not determined how these cases would proceed.

In May 2008 the National Government announced that it would pay approximately \$80 million (Rs. 330 Crores) in relief to victims of the 2002 post-Godhra riots in Gujarat, fulfilling commitments it had made in November 2006. The 2006 package had four components: death compensation for next-of-kin in the amount of \$ 8,333 (Rs. 3.5 lakhs); compensation for the 2,548 injured persons in the amount of \$2,900 (Rs. 1.25 lakh); additional compensation for property damage, ten times the amount paid by the Government of Gujarat; and assistance in finding homes and jobs for victims who lost their livelihoods and were permanently displaced. The money for the first component was released by the National Government in 2007 and distributed by the Government of Gujarat between January and March 2008. While compensation has been issued in 1,000 cases, NGOs working with victims claim that the Government of Gujarat is refusing to compensate cases associated with approximately 800 "missing persons." In May 2008 the National Government released the money to the Government of Gujarat for the second and third components of the package.

In June 2008 a Metropolitan court in Mumbai acquitted 12 persons who were accused in the 1992-93 Mumbai communal riot cases. They had been charged with arson and looting following the demolition of the Babri Masjid Mosque.

Since an organized insurgency erupted in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989, there have been numerous reports of human rights abuses by security forces, local officials, and separatists. It remained difficult to separate religion and politics in Kashmir; Kashmiri separatists were predominantly Muslim, and almost all the higher ranks as well as most of the lower ranks in the military forces stationed there were non-Muslim. The vast majority of the 61,000-member Jammu and Kashmir police force was Muslim. Kashmiri Hindus remained vulnerable to violence. Most lived in refugee camps outside of the valley and were awaiting safe return. In May 2004, May 2005, and April 2006 the Jammu and Kashmir Government allowed a procession of separatist groups to mark the anniversary of the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

On May 26, 2008, the Jammu and Kashmir Government decided to transfer 100 acres of land to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB), a government-run organization that oversees an annual Hindu pilgrimage to a shrine in the Himalayas. Kashmiri residents motivated by Muslim separatist groups began nonviolent protesting. By June 23 the protests had gained momentum, and on June 25 the situation turned violent when police opened fire, killing two teenagers and injuring more than seventy protestors and police. On June 30 the SASB withdrew its claim to the land and ownership reverted to the state government. Separatist leaders accused the National Government and the state government of illegally confiscating public land and settling non-Kashmiris in an attempt to set up a Hindu state and change the demographics in the Muslim-majority state.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversions, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Authorities arrested numerous Christians under state-level "anticonversion" laws during the reporting period for allegedly engaging in conversions by force, allurements, or fraud (for more information, see Abuses). Hindu nationalist organizations frequently alleged that Christian missionaries lured low-caste Hindus with offers of free education and healthcare and equated such actions with forced conversions. Christians responded that low-caste Hindus converted of their own free will and that efforts by Hindu groups to "reconvert" these new Christians to Hinduism were themselves accompanied by offers of remuneration and thus fraudulent.

#### Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

Terrorist groups perpetrated atrocities against civilians, including minority Hindu members of the Pandit (Hindu Brahmin) community, in the long-lasting insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, including car bombings, forced housing of terrorists, executions, and sexual assaults. Retaliatory killings by terrorists were also common. Security forces used targeted but at times excessive force to suppress them, with civilians frequently the main victims.

Terrorists attempted to provoke interreligious conflict by detonating bombs.

In May 2008 a terrorist attack killed approximately 100 persons and injured over 400 in Jaipur, Rajasthan. According to press reports, the Bangladesh- and Pakistan-based Harkat ul-Jihadul-Islami claimed responsibility for the attack.

On October 11, 2007, 2 persons were killed and 17 others injured when a bomb exploded in the dargah (shrine) of the Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Rajasthan. Another person later died due to injuries from the blast.

On August 29, 2007, a bomb exploded inside the Laxmi Narayan temple in Bhaderwah town, Doda district, Jammu and Kashmir. No casualties or injuries were reported.

On August 25, 2007, bombs exploded in Lumbini Park, Hyderabad, and at a popular restaurant, killing 42 and injuring more than 60. Beginning in January 2008, police in several states began arresting suspects possibly linked to the bombings. Some reports suggest that those responsible had links to the SIMI, the Pakistan-based Lasker-e-Taiba, and/or the Harkat-ul-Jihadul-Islami.

Terrorists detonated bombs inside the famous mosque, Mecca Masjid, in Hyderabad on May 18, 2007, killing nine, allegedly to provoke interreligious conflict.

#### Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On October 22, 2007, the Tamil Nadu Assembly unanimously passed a law granting Muslims and Christians belonging to the "Backward Classes" separate reservations (quotas) for education and employment. Each of the communities was to receive a 3.5 percent share in government jobs and educational opportunities. Approximately 90 percent of the Muslims and 75 percent of the Christians in Tamil Nadu belong to the "Backward Classes" and were already eligible for reservations alongside Hindu members of the "Backward Classes."

The Andhra Pradesh Government allocated \$474,000 (Rs. 20,145,000) in the 2008 budget as subsidies to Christians wanting to visit the Holy Land.

In December 2007, during the campaigning for Gujarat state parliamentary elections, the Central Election Commission (CEC) censured Congress President Sonia Gandhi, Congress leader Digvijay Singh, and Gujarat BJP Chief Minister Narendra Modi for their references to the death of an alleged Muslim criminal, Sohrabuddin, in a police encounter. The CEC warned these leaders not to use divisive language in their

election campaigns.

In June 2008 the National Government directed all universities through the Universities Grants Commission to increase the number of Muslim teachers in colleges located in areas with a high concentration of Muslims. The move was ostensibly to encourage more Muslim students to enroll in higher education and was a result of the post-Sachar Committee report findings.

During January-March 2008 the Government of Gujarat paid additional death compensation to the next-of-kin of the victims of 2002 violence, approximately \$8,750 (Rs. 380,581), implementing a November 2006 decision of the state government that granted this additional compensation to equalize the Gujarat victims' compensation to the victims of 1984 anti-Sikh violence.

In March 2008, on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Vasant Pachami, the local BJP administration avoided strife by allowing both Hindus and Muslims to offer prayers at a disputed religious site in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh, but at different times during the day.

The National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH), an autonomous body under the Ministry of Home Affairs, continued to provide assistance for the physical and psychological rehabilitation of child victims of communal, caste, ethnic, or terrorist violence, with special reference to their care, education, and training. The NFCH also promoted communal harmony, fraternity, and national integration by providing financial assistance to rehabilitate minority children. It has also given grants to states to hold events that promote communal harmony. The NFCH also granted scholarships, fellowships, and annual awards to individuals, organizations, and student unions who have reflected a secular image and promoted harmony.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar announced the Government would provide free textbooks to Muslim students and \$240 (Rs. 10,200) to each student of the community who secured first division marks in their matriculation examinations. The announcement came in November 2007, days after the Bihar Government declared it would provide compensation to 128 families for the 1989 Bhagalpur riots. Muslims constitute 16.5 percent of Bihar's 83 million population.

In July 2007 a local court convicted 14 persons and sentenced them to life imprisonment for their actions during the Bhagalpur riots 17 years earlier. The riots began on the night of October 27, 1989, when a "Ramlila" procession organized by a local VHP leader at the peak of the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign was allegedly attacked while passing through a Muslim neighborhood. Violence soon engulfed several parts of Bhagalpur and the adjoining Banka. In Logai village, 116 Muslims were massacred and buried in a mass grave. Among those convicted were two policemen. Before the riots, there were 45 Muslim families in Logai village; by the end of 1990 only two remained. The Justice NN Singh Inquiry Commission recommended that victims receive the same compensation package as the victims of the 1984 Sikh riots. At the end of the reporting period, the Government had not approved the recommendation.

On October 29, 2007, an Orissa court sentenced Dara Singh to life imprisonment for the 1999 murder of a Muslim trader, Shaikh Rehman. Singh was already serving a life sentence for burning to death Australian missionary Graham Staines and his sons in Orissa in 1999. In September 2007 the court sentenced Singh and three others for murdering Catholic priest Arul Doss in 1999 at Jamubani, Orissa.

The NHRC and NCM continued to promote freedom of religion during the reporting period. Through their annual reports and investigations, they focused attention on human rights problems and, where possible, encouraged judicial resolutions.

Interfaith cooperation on social issues within particular religious minority communities led to a promotion of harmony.

Religious minority leaders worked together on HIV/AIDS prevention initiatives. In Maharashtra, Avert Society worked with Christian and Muslim religious leaders to promote behavior change messages within vulnerable populations. In Thane district, a local NGO, Kripa Foundation, carried out advocacy work with two Catholic Church parishes to promote HIV/AIDS messages in the fishing community of 40,000 persons. In Nagpur district, the local NGO, Comprehensive Rural and Tribal Development Program (CRTDP), worked with two

imams to promote HIV messages among the Muslim community in large slums with a population of 70,200. The imams, during Friday prayers, included HIV/AIDS messages in their discourse and provided information on the availability of series on STI treatment. In this intervention, more than 240 peer educators were identified and trained within the Muslim community and treated 120 STI cases.

Since 2005 the Women's Legal Rights Initiative (WLRI) has supported research, advocacy, and outreach initiatives in Rajasthan to prevent female feticide in collaboration with religious leaders of Jain, Maheshwari, Sikh, Jat, Brahmin, and Rajput communities. The Sikh community made a strong commitment to the cause of the girl child. Priests held sermons on caring for girls between prayers and at community weddings, asking newlyweds to never practice sex selection of children. Women went door to door to sensitize their community members and ask them to sign oath papers vowing never to undergo sex selection for themselves and their families. The Sikh community decided that "Lohhri," a widely celebrated harvest festival, would be celebrated to welcome and honor the birth of daughters, a practice hitherto reserved for boys. The Jain Terapanth Mahila Mandal, with partial support from the United Nations Population Fund, sensitized married and unmarried women on the issue of sex determination, female feticide, and combating female sex selective abortions. Girls took a written oath to say they would not marry a groom who asked for dowry. They also released two music albums featuring songs celebrating girls. These songs became a regular part of their religious get-togethers. The community magazines regularly carry features against sex-selective abortions.

### Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The country's population of 1.1 billion includes innumerable religious traditions; there were instances of societal discrimination and violence based in whole or in part on religious affiliation. Many such incidents were linked to politics, nationalism, conversion, or retaliation. Economic competition between religious communities played an important role in conflicts. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs' 2007-08 annual report, there were 761 instances of communal violence or violence along religious lines, in which 99 persons were killed and 2,227 injured.

Efforts at ecumenical understanding brought religious leaders together to defuse religious tensions. Prominent secularists of all religious groups made public efforts to show respect for other religious groups by celebrating their holidays and attending social events such as weddings. Muslim groups protested against the mistreatment of Christians by Hindu extremists. Christian clergy and spokespersons for Christian organizations issued public statements condemning anti-Muslim violence in places such as Gujarat.

Members of all religious communities spoke up against terrorism. In February 2008 the influential conservative madrassah, Darul Uloom Deoband, held an antiterrorism conference and issued an antiterrorism declaration. The conference was followed by a mass rally in Delhi in June 2008, in which clerics from madrassah and leaders from its political wing, Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind, officially issued a fatwa, declaring terrorism to be un-Islamic.

The media continued to highlight the discrimination prevailing in several villages in southern Tamil Nadu preventing Dalits from participating in temple festivities such as holding the ceremonial ropes in temple car festivals. Local media also pointed out that Dalits are usually denied access to burial grounds or even to public streets dominated by certain upper castes.

The media reported that 296 Dalit Christians reconverted to Hinduism in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, on April 14, 2008. The media quoted one of the converts as saying that the reconversion would make them eligible for the benefits being extended by the Government to the SC/STs. He also alleged reconversion was sought because allegedly there is no equality in Christianity, where Dalits are treated like secondary citizens, just as they are in Hinduism.

Kerala's famous Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple authorities received much public criticism for prohibiting "non-Hindus" (persons born to a non-Hindu parent or parents) to enter the temple area even after they declared their faith to the temple deity. On several occasions, the temple reportedly conducted purification rituals after the "unlawful" entry of such persons to the temple. The temple authorities maintained that those who were born to a non-Hindu parent or parents could declare their devotion in writing and get a certificate from the Arya Samajam (a traditional Hindu organization) to gain admission to the temple.



On June 3, 2008, Hindu Aikyavedi activists staged a violent march to a church headquarters in Thiruvalla, Kerala. Media reported that the activists threw stones at several Christian institutions, and demanded investigation into the financial transactions of one of the churches and its overseas affiliate.

In April 2008 there were clashes involving approximately 300 persons in a village in Karnataka after Dalits performed Puja to mark "Ugadi" in the Chamundeshwari temple. Many houses belonging to the Dalit community were damaged. Police responded by visiting the village and ordering additional security. The Dalit community condemned the clashes that also resulted in injuries to police. Police arrested 28 Hindus under the Prevention of Atrocities against Scheduled Castes and Tribes Act. At the end of the reporting period the detainees were all free on bail, and no hearing date had been scheduled.

On March 22, 2008, at the end of the Hindu festival Holi, in the Rewa district of Madhya Pradesh, local Bajrang Dal members beat family members of a 15-year-old girl because the family protected the girl from being raped.

On March 10, 2008, Tibetan refugees in the country began a march to the border with China. However, police in Himachal Pradesh arrested more than 100 of the refugees, mostly monks and nuns, citing breach of an agreement between New Delhi and Tibet's government-in-exile, headed by the Dalai Lama. In addition, police arrested approximately 40 Tibetan women who protested in front of the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi. In spite of several March arrests in association with Tibetan protests, the Tibetan Buddhist community commented that relations with the Government and local residents were good and that they did not believe the community to be persecuted.

In January 2008 in UP, a Hindu priest attacked Sudhir Kumar, a Dalit, for attempting to enter the Mahadev temple to celebrate a Puja. He was accompanied by three other men. Once news of the attack was made public, a group of Dalits informed senior district administration officials about the incident. A FIR was registered; an investigation was in process at the end of the reporting period.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs annual report for 2007-08, approximately 34,878 Pandit families from Jammu and Kashmir were living in 12 refugee camps in Jammu at the end of the reporting period, and 19,338 families were still in Delhi's 14 camps. There were a total of 55,456 Kashmiri migrant families living under displaced conditions.

On June 20, 2008, a Sikh was killed while protesting against Ram Rahim Singh, head of the Dera Sacha Sauda (a breakaway Sikh faction). Police arrested the bodyguards who had killed the Sikh. Riots by 1,500 members of Mumbai's Sikh community followed the next day to demand the arrest of Ram Rahim Singh. The rioters shut down parts of Mumbai's northern suburbs through various coercive methods, including brandishing swords. The tension died down in Mumbai after the victim's funeral. The two Sikh communities have a history of conflict between them.

In June 2008 a group of more than 200 Sikhs attacked the office of MTV India in Mumbai in protest of a poster promoting a reality show that they felt provided an unflattering depiction of a Sikh youth.

There were instances of religiously motivated violence and sectarian rioting, including mob violence or vigilante action and Hindu-Muslim communal violence.

According to media reports, 40 were injured in Sagar Island when the RSS and local Muslim villagers clashed over the RSS's intent to have a presence on the island.

According to media reports, on April 14, 2008, Hindus and Muslims clashed in Visnagar, Gujarat, and six persons were injured. On April 15, Hindu-Muslim clashes in Raver, Maharashtra, over a Hindu religious procession led to the death of two Hindus when police fired on rioters. Hindus burnt several Muslim-owned houses and businesses. The police imposed a curfew for 3 days.

In February 2008 the Mumbai-based Center for the Study of Society and Secularism reported various instances of Hindu-Muslim clashes in 2007. According to this compilation, on October 22, 2007, 26 persons

were injured in Hindu-Muslim clashes in Amravati, Maharashtra, during the Hindu Goddess Durga immersion procession. On September 28, 2007, Hindus and Muslims clashed in Khamgaon, Maharashtra during a procession in honor of the Hindu God Ganesha. The clashes in Khamgaon continued for 2 days, and police imposed a curfew. On September 22, 2007, and September 27, 2007, in Vadodara, Gujarat, Hindus and Muslims clashed during Hindu religious processions during the Ganesha festival. On September 19, 2007, in Surat district of Gujarat, Hindus and Muslims clashed over the alleged murder by Muslims of a Hindu, anti-cow-slaughter activist Jasubhai Darbar. As the news of the murder spread, Hindus from surrounding villages attacked a Muslim majority village, Kosadi and burned several Islamic businesses and houses. On September 17, 2007, Hindus and Muslims clashed in Jalgaon, Maharashtra over the changed route of the Ganesha procession.

Although not decreed by fatwas, some Muslims attempted to impose their religious views concerning ethical and moral conduct on their fellow Muslims.

The issue of conversion of Hindus or members of lower castes to Christianity remained highly sensitive and resulted in assaults and/or arrests of Christians. However, Christians often held large public prayer meetings without violence or protests. For example, Joyce Meyer Ministries held prayer meetings involving thousands of worshippers in Mumbai January 17-20, 2008.

According to *Compass Direct News*, "Thus far in modern India, 2007 was the most violent year for Christians. With more than 800 reported attacks around Christmas time in Orissa state, the number of attacks on Christians last year crossed 1,000 for the first time since India's Independence in 1947. The AICC, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and the Christian Legal Association recorded at least 200 incidents of anti-Christian attacks, including 4 murders, before violence erupted in Orissa's Kandhamal district that killed at least 5 Christians and burned 730 houses and 95 churches."

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), in its March 2008 report, stated that "excluding the Orissa violence, during 2007 an average of approximately three to four religiously-motivated attacks per week was recorded against the small Christian minority community." CSW noted, "There continued to be a chronic problem of impunity for perpetrators of religiously-motivated violence....the propagation of a culture assuming the illegitimacy of religious conversions from Hinduism fuelled the wider pattern of anti-Christian violence in 2007. Such a culture is rooted in the extremist nationalist ideology of 'Hindutva', which in practice seeks to preserve and defend the cultural hegemony of Hinduism at the expense of minority religions."

AICC-Orissa reported five deaths in the Kandhamal violence on December 24, 2007. Although tensions simmered through the end of the reporting period, they lessened as the Government became more responsive to concerns about law and order. A rehabilitation camp at Barakhama provided shelter to more than 700 persons. By the end of the reporting period, fewer than 100 remained in the camp. Nearly 100 persons were arrested for alleged involvement and the Justice B. Panigrahi Commission was set up to inquire into the Kandhamal incidents. More than 400 affidavits were filed.

According to AICC, the highest number of reported attacks occurred in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. In these incidents Christians alleged that Hindu extremists disrupted prayer meetings, destroyed or damaged places of worship, vandalized property, assaulted pastors and lay persons, confiscated and destroyed religious material, and attempted to intimidate Christians from attending religious services. There were also reported incidents where Christians physically attacked by others were further victimized when the police arrested them rather than the attackers. Christians also claimed that authorities filed false charges of conversion by force and allurement, and that police were biased in how they registered complaints, doing so promptly only when the accused was a Christian.

AICC reported 28 acts of violence committed against Christians in Andhra Pradesh between June 2007 and June 2008. AICC accused Hindu extremist organizations of physically assaulting pastors and congregants, destroying and vandalizing churches, and attacking schools. Members of the Hindu community accused Christians of engaging in unethical conversion activities and proselytizing.

The 2008 New Year celebrations of a Seventh-day Adventist prayer group in Basavanahally, Chikmangalur District, Karnataka was disrupted after 25 alleged Hindu fundamentalists barged into the hall and assaulted some of those present. While Christian groups allege that a car and motorcycle were burned, police sources

claim only slight damage to property. Police sources alleged that the Christian group's use of a public address system in the prayer hall located in a residential area caused considerable resentment.

On January 16, 2008, in the Durg district of Chhattisgarh, more than 80 persons were injured in an attack on a large Christian meeting. Police arrested one of the attackers. At least a dozen Christians were injured in an assault on a missionary camp in Dhamtari. The attackers reportedly were from the Dharma Sena (Religion Army), emboldened by a nearby meeting of the BJP.

On February 24, 2008, allegedly 125 members of RSS and the Bajrang Dal attacked a church in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, brutally beating one of the fleeing members. The attackers broke windows in the church and damaged a cross outside, but the fleeing members had locked the doors, protecting the sanctuary. Police intervened at the scene and arrested four of the attackers. When church services resumed, eight persons from the same mob returned to attack again. Police, already present, arrested three of them.

Individuals in Nizamabad district, Andhra Pradesh, beat Pastor Vijay of Bestha Gangaram on February 17, 2008. Locals accused him of engaging in unethical conversion.

On October 2, 2008, in Shahdol district, Madhya Pradesh, approximately 20 members of the Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena disrupted a Christian meeting and roughed up a pastor belonging to the Marthoma Church. Police responded but made no arrests.

Members of the RSS reportedly disrupted a worship service in the Kanker district of Chhattisgarh on September 23, 2007, barging into the church and assaulting the pastor. The police later took a report from the pastor but made no arrests.

According to AICC, Hindu activists attacked a pastor in Hyderabad in September 2007 for alleged conversion activities. The police arrested 11 attackers.

On August 31, 2007, in the Rewa district of Madhya Pradesh, members of the *Bajrang Dal* beat a 24-year-old Christian as he was walking along a village road. The assailants warned him to stop going to prayer meetings. The same individual had previously been beaten and accused of forcible conversion. No police involvement was reported.

On August 5, 2007, in the Durg district of Chhattisgarh, alleged members of the Bajrang Dal disrupted the Sunday worship service of a church and attacked the pastor and an elder. The crowd accused the pastor of forcible conversions, destroyed Bibles, and vandalized the house where the church members met. The Supela police station registered a complaint against the attackers but arrested no one.

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation in 2008 issued notices to church authorities for the demolition of St. Anthony Church in Mettuguda. The Catholic Association of Hyderabad, United Front for Dalit Christian Rights, and other Christian associations alleged state government discrimination against the church. The Government of Andhra Pradesh refuted the allegations, noting that the proposed demolition was intended to widen the adjacent road.

On July 1, 2007, in Assam, missionary Hemanta Das was beaten up in Guwahati and died from injuries after 4 days. The attackers were allegedly "Hindutva" extremists.

Faith-based media outlets reported separate incidents of attacks on Christian prayer meetings or Christian individuals by Hindu extremists in Chhattisgarh. Christians alleged that Hindu groups, such as Dharma Sena or the Dharm Raksha Sena (Religion Protection Army) (DRS), disrupted prayer meetings, assaulted pastors and lay persons, and confiscated and destroyed religious material. Christians also claimed that authorities filed false charges of conversion by force and allurements and that the police was biased in how it registered complaints, doing so promptly only when the accused was a Christian.

On June 22, 2008, members of the Sangh Parivar attacked a Christian prayer meeting in Dehra Dun, Uttaranchal. The pastor and many other participants were beaten. The police refused to register a FIR and

asked the aggrieved party to report the matter to the local BJP leader. The local leaders later denied the Sangh Parivar's hand in the incident. There were no further developments.

On February 14, 2008, Bajrang Dal members attacked a Catholic priest and staff members of Sachidanand Ashram, a Catholic center promoting interreligious dialogue in Narsinghpur District, Madhya Pradesh. The attackers also destroyed furniture at the center. The police filed charges against approximately 40 persons for assaulting the priest and others at the center.

On January 13, 2008, Hindu extremists dragged a new Christian convert to a police station and demanded that he be arrested for converting others in Kunkuri area of Jashpur district of Chhattisgarh. The police detained the Christian for a few hours, but no charges were filed.

On January 10, 2008, in the Raipur district of Chhattisgarh, Hindu nationalists disrupted a prayer meeting and beat five Christians. The attackers then filed a police complaint against three of the victims, who were arrested. The pastors who were leading the meeting alleged they had been invited by non-Christian villagers to conduct the meeting attended by more than 150 local persons.

On July 15, 2008, in the Rewa district of Madhya Pradesh, members of the *Bajrang Dal* beat three pastors and held knives to the throats of their wives. A Christian police inspector had recently attended a prayer meeting with the victims. The attackers accused the inspector of helping local Christian workers to convert Hindus by fraudulent means. The assailants had visited and videotaped the meeting on July 1, but because of police protection they could not attack. Police arrested four persons in connection with the assault but released them on bail.

On October 5, 2007, in the Kanker district of Chhattisgarh, a pastor and one other Christian who had been holding a prayer and fasting meeting in the pastor's home were jailed on charges of intent to insult the Hindu religion. Members of an extremist group, Jan Sevak (People's Service), broke into the pastor's home and dragged him to the village council where a complaint was filed against him.

Media reported a group of Hindu activists objected to the distribution of Christian literature by a group of Christian women in Mahbubnagar District, Andhra Pradesh, on August 8, 2007.

On August 26, 2007, in the Durg district of Chhattisgarh, police arrested two pastors on charges of "hurting religious feelings" and fraudulent conversion. The arrests followed the disruption of a church's Sunday worship service by the police and anti-Christian extremists. Before the Sunday service, a pastor baptized five persons. Allegedly those at the baptism attested that their conversion was voluntary, but two other persons told the police that they had been offered money by two pastors to convert.

On July 29, 2007, Hindu extremists in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, stormed a Sunday worship service at Maranatha Worship Church, assaulted the pastor, and vandalized audio equipment and furniture. The attack was led by a relative of the pastor who objected to the pastor's conversion 4 years earlier. The pastor was forcibly dragged to the police station, where he was charged with "obscene acts and songs" (IPC 294) and trespassing. He was released on bail 1 hour later.

Religious media outlets reported several attacks in Gujarat on Christians by Hindu groups during the reporting period. On October 28, 2007, in the Navsari district, Hindu villagers attacked a Christian man and warned him against attending his church. Religious media reported that later the same day, the attackers went to the church and threatened the pastor, saying they would kill the Christians if they came together for worship. Police allegedly refused to register the victim's complaint.

On September 16, 2007, in Jharkhand, Ajay Topno, a TransWorld Radio missionary was killed for alleged Christian activities among the poor. Topno's body was found in the jungle near the village. AICC appealed to the state government to probe the incident and punish the culprits.

In August 2007 suspected Hindu extremists vandalized a Catholic church in the Salcette area of the State of Goa. The church did not report the incident to police.

In May 2007 the media alleged that a group of approximately 20 persons led by a local member of the RSS forcibly shaved the heads of two Christian workers to mark their "reconversion" to Hinduism after attacking them in Dhalpur, Himachal Pradesh. Bernard Christopher and Ravinder Kumar Gautam, both Christian workers of the Transfiguration Missionary Society, moved out of Kullu district fearing for their lives after the incident. They had been working in the state since January 25.

According to religious media, there were reported acts of violence during the reporting period against Christians in the state of Karnataka. Religious press reported injuries to pastors and congregants (male and female), threats and intimidation, and destruction of property and places of worship. Attackers disrupted prayer meetings and church services.

On November 4, 2007, in Gundelpet, Karnataka, unidentified assailants beat a pastor and accused him of prostitution after he visited a female congregant. The attackers took him to the police and filed the complaint against him. The police refused to register the pastor's complaint against the attackers.

Numerous acts of violence against Christians in Madhya Pradesh were reported. On January 11, 2008, police in Barwani District arrested a pastor and five others on charges of allurement, rioting, obscene acts, voluntarily "causing hurt, " and criminal intimidation. Those arrested stated that the charges were false. All were released on bail.

On October 25, 2007, in Shukliya, approximately 9 miles from Indore city, armed men beat five Catholic nuns attending a prayer service. The police refused to register a complaint until the following evening, after the Catholic diocese threatened a hunger strike.

On October 11, 2007, in Harda District, three Hindu teachers of a Christian school beat the school director and filed a complaint against him charging that school management was converting pupils. The school alleged that the teachers were fired during their probationary period for failure to produce their teaching certificates and that the teachers beat the director in revenge. No one was arrested.

On July 18, 2007, in Satna District, a dozen masked men wielding clubs entered the grounds of a Catholic religious community and six of them assaulted four men. The Satna police superintendent registered a case against the 12 unidentified persons, but no arrests were reported.

There were numerous reports of violence against Christians in Maharashtra. According to the *Times of India*, on March 15, 2008, in Raighad District, a group of approximately 40 men and women assaulted 2 nuns, members of an NGO about to hold an AIDS awareness program. The attackers dragged the nuns into a gutter and accused them of forcibly converting tribal persons to Christianity. Police arrested 13 Hindus for rioting and causing minor injuries but released them later on bail.

On November 2, 2007, in Thane District, unidentified individuals attacked Christians attending prayer services in private homes and chased them away.

On October 4, 2007, in Ahmednagar, Hindu extremists broke up a Christian prayer meeting in a private home and accused the Christians of forcible conversions. Reportedly the attackers took the Christians out of the house one at a time and beat them. Police officers freed those who had come to pray and took the attackers in for questioning, holding them until 12:30 a.m. that night. The victims did not file any complaints against the attackers.

On September 18, 2007, in Bhandara District, a local Hindu extremist threatened a Christian woman with rape and blamed her for injuries he sustained when he was drunk and fell off his motorbike. He blamed the woman for causing conflicts in the neighborhood when she started a Believer's Church. Police helped the Christians and Hindus reach an agreement to coexist. No charges were filed.

On August 25, 2007, in Pune District, unidentified Hindu extremist youths launched a second attack on a pastor, pelting his car with rocks. Earlier in the year six youths had assaulted the pastor at his home. Reportedly the pastor filed police complaints in both incidents, but no police action was reported.

On July 16, 2007, in Thane District, Hindu extremists demolished the house of Christian convert Arjun Pashi. During the attack they derided the victim for his Christian faith. Fear of further persecution allegedly kept the victim from registering a complaint.

Religious media outlets reported numerous acts of violence against Christians in Orissa. Some of the affected pastors and congregants were seeking legal redress.

On December 24, 2007, RSS, Bajrang Dal, VHP, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram and allied Sangh Parivar groups in Bamunigan village burned Christmas decorations that had been erected on the road. The local Catholic presbytery was looted and set on fire, and shops belonging to Christians were destroyed. The dispute escalated and spread to nearby areas, including Phulbani. Dalit Christians, mostly of the Pana community, fled the village for cover in nearby forests. According to reports, on the same day in a nearby village, Christian youth attacked the vehicle of Hindu leader Laxmanananda Saraswati, who later alleged he was physically assaulted. Reports of this alleged attack exacerbated tensions between the Sangh Parivar groups and the Christian community. Over the next 3 days across Kandhamal, approximately 100 churches and Christian institutions were damaged, more than 700 Christian homes destroyed, 22 Christian-owned businesses damaged, and 4 Christian men killed, according to the AICC. Several NGOs judged this to constitute "the largest attack on the Christian community in the history of democratic India". The outbreak of violence was partly a result of a long-simmering conflict between Pana (Christian tribe members) and Kui tribespeople. Panas have been demanding reservation status in the ST category, which was opposed by the Kuis. According to NGOs, the VHP exploited the tensions between the Kui and Pana to launch the Christmas attacks. Several groups also reported allegations of police negligence.

Attacks on Catholic, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches occurred in Balliguda town on the evening of December 24, 2007, resulting in significant damages to church property.

There was an attack on a Pentecostal church in Barkhama village on December 24, 2007, involving substantial physical damage to the building. The village was the scene of the largest number of attacks on Christian property: in total, an estimated 415 houses were destroyed, and 6 of the 7 church buildings in the village were seriously damaged.

There was also an attack on the Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church and its compound in Brahminigaon on Christmas Day; in addition, on December 27, 2007, attacks occurred against several houses and property belonging to Hindus in Brahminigaon.

Attacks were reported on churches and Christian property in Bodagan, Dalagaon, Iripiguda, Kamapada, Kalingia, Khajuripoda, Kothaghar, Kulpakia, Nuagaon, Padangi, Phirignia, Sankharahole, Sirtiguda, Srasananda, Tikapali, and Tumudibandha.

On April 7, 2008, the Supreme Court permitted relief activities by churches and other organizations in the affected areas. On January 11, 2008, however, the Kandhamal District Collector ordered that no charitable or religious organization be allowed to undertake relief work. The Archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar challenged the order in Orissa High Court, which refused to intervene. The Collector defended the order in court saying religious institutions would focus on a particular community for providing relief, create ill feeling among other groups, and disrupt the peace. The Archbishop then appealed to the Supreme Court, which issued a notice to the Orissa Government putting a stay on the District Collector's directive. Christians constitute 2.4 percent of Orissa's population; of Kandhamal's 648,000 residents, 52 percent are Adivasis (an ST) and 16 percent Christians.

The AICC reported a number of incidents in the eastern area of the country, besides the Kandhamal violence in December 2007. On June 2, 2007, in Orissa, two pastors were beaten by Hindutva extremists at Jamaguda, Gajapati District. Pastor Kanstantino Pariccha and one of his associates were attacked while preparing to hold a prayer meeting in the village.

On February 14, 2008, in Orissa, VHP activists threatened six Dalit Christian families of a Baptist church near Balliguda. The Dalits were reportedly told to abandon Christianity and convert to Hinduism, leave the village, or suffer death.

Religious media reported acts of violence against Christians in Rajasthan during the reporting period. In October 2007 local villagers lodged a police complaint against two Christian workers from the Believers' Church of India (BCI) in Jhunjhunu District for forcibly converting people to Christianity. Police arrested Panna Lal and Dhan Raj and kept them overnight, releasing them the next day. The main charge against the workers was that they had visited houses of those who had recently converted to Christianity after hearing a radio program aired by the BCI on the religion.

On October 15, 2007, local police came to the Father's Children Home in Jaipur and interrogated its warden, Jacob John, said Sajjan K. George of the Global Council of Indian Christians. Veerendra Singh Rana, one of the prime suspects of another attack on a pastor, lodged the complaint accusing the wardens of Father's Children Home in Jaipur of indulging in human trafficking and prostitution. The police did not lodge a formal complaint.

There were acts of vandalism against religious properties documented by faith-based media during the reporting period. As detailed elsewhere in this report, a pastor's home in Maharashtra was vandalized and a church in Goa damaged. In Chhattisgarh, two homes where worship services were being conducted were vandalized and the principal's office at a Catholic school was ransacked because the school refused to close for a Hindu holiday. In Madhya Pradesh, there were three different property-related cases of anti-Christian violence, including destruction of the roof of a house where a prayer service was held.

Faith-based groups maintained that during the reporting period, BJP Member of Parliament Dilipsinh Judeo organized several "Ghar-wapasi" (homecoming) programs to allegedly "reconvert" Christian tribals to Hinduism in Jashpur, Chhattisgarh. In most of these programs, tribals, regardless of whether or not they attended Christian prayer meetings, were "sanctified" by Judeo. Faith-based organizations claimed that tribals are animists and not Hindus, and that the rituals are tantamount to a "conversion" to Hinduism. In a press conference held by Maharashtra-based Hindu religious organization "Ramanandacharya Peeth," on April 27, 2008, Peeth reported "reconverting" 40,427 tribals to Hinduism during 2006-07. One such ceremony was organized on April 27, 2008, on the outskirts of Mumbai, where 1,700 tribals from Thane and Nashik districts were "reconverted" to Hinduism.

In June 2008 villagers stoned four members of a Santhal tribal family, including two women, and accused them of practicing witchcraft in Assam. Approximately 500 persons have been killed in Assam and half as many in West Bengal for allegedly being witches.

In May 2008 a woman accused of witchcraft was physically assaulted and set on fire in a tribal village in Orissa. Police arrested three villagers, one of whom was her husband. According to Reuters, dozens of women are killed every year on suspicion of being witches or witch doctors.

The Andhra Pradesh Federation of Churches, an apex body of Catholic, Protestant, and other Christian denominations, demanded exemption from proposed legislation of the State Government to control church properties. In December 2007 Chief Minister Y.S.R. Reddy rejected the draft bill and assured that his Government would not impinge on the constitutional rights of minorities or interfere in the internal administration of churches.

The AICC and Andhra Pradesh Federation of Churches expressed concern that the "Propagation of other religions in the places of worship or prayer (Prohibition) Law" is a first step in the implementation of a Hindu nationalist agenda and will embolden extremists, leading to further attacks against Christians in the state.

Discrimination based on caste is officially illegal but remained prevalent, especially in rural areas. With more job opportunities in the private sector and better chances of upward social mobility, the country has begun a quiet social transformation in this area. However, in rural areas, caste remained a major impediment to social advancement, and low-caste Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh Dalits continued to face class and race discrimination as a result. Some Dalits who sought to convert out of a desire to escape discrimination and violence encountered hostility and backlash from upper castes. Ultimately, caste is a complex issue entrenched in society.

Despite government measures, the practice of dedicating Devadasis reportedly continued in several southern

states, including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Devadasis are young, generally prepubescent girls who are dedicated to a Hindu deity or temple as "servants of god." They may not marry, must live apart from their families, and are required to provide sexual services to priests and others. Reportedly, many Devadasis eventually are sold to urban brothels. The Devadasi tradition is linked, to some degree, to both trafficking and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Since Devadasis are by custom required to be sexually available to higher caste men, it reportedly is difficult for them to obtain justice from the legal system if they are raped. Estimates of the number of Devadasis in the country varied; in Karnataka, media sources reported as few as 23,000 and as many as 100,000. The Karnataka State Women's Development Corporation claims to have enumerated 22,873 Devadasis in the state and to have rehabilitated 11,342 Devadasis by providing them seed capital to set up small businesses.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy and the three U.S. consulates continued to promote religious freedom through discussions with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials. The Embassy and consulates also regularly met with civil society activists and religious leaders and reported on events and trends that affect religious freedom.

The U.S. Government supported a wide range of initiatives to encourage religious and communal tolerance and freedom. Members of the embassy community celebrated Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jewish festivals throughout the reporting period with members of the various religious communities. The Embassy and consulates also hosted Iftaar (breaking the fast) dinners during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

Throughout the reporting period, mission officers investigated and reported on numerous cases of alleged religious persecution, ongoing cases in Gujarat, attacks against Christians in Orissa, arrests of Tibetan protesters, discrimination against Dalits, and religiously motivated attacks by militants and terrorists.

Mission officers also monitored the plight of internally displaced Kashmiri Hindus, known as Pandits, who fled their home areas in the valley of Kashmir starting in 1989 due to attacks on them by terrorists seeking to drive out non-Muslim minorities.

Embassy officers regularly met with commissioners from the NHRC and NCM regarding actions by the state government that have been injurious to the free exercise of belief by religious minorities.

During the reporting period, embassy and consulate officials met with leaders of all significant minority communities to discuss religious freedom concerns. The NGO and missionary communities in the country were extremely active on questions of religious freedom, and mission officers meet regularly with local NGOs.

The U.S. Government continued to express regret over the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002, and urged all parties in Gujarat to resolve their differences peacefully. Consulate and senior embassy officers also met in Mumbai with a range of NGO, business, media, and other contacts, including Muslim leaders, to monitor the aftermath of the Gujarat violence. The Embassy and consulates reached out to madrassahs directly and through the special International Visitor Madrassah programs; religious freedom, tolerance, and respect for diversity were topics of discussion.

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